Disinformation Campaign on Twitter: Pro-India accounts disseminating disinformation ahead of Pakistan FATF review

Digital Rights Foundation
October 21, 2020

Background
On the eve and day of October 21, 2020, there was a flurry of pro-India Twitter accounts creating the narrative that there was a ‘civil war’ unfolding in Pakistan, specifically in the country’s largest urban center Karachi. Political developments from Pakistan such as protests from within the ranks of the Sindh police against the siege of the Inspector General House on October 19 and an explosion that left 5 people dead in Karachi on October 21 were weaponised to build a misleading narrative regarding the ‘civil unrest’ in the country. The cause of the explosion is under investigation, but there are credible reports that it was due to gas leakage, however the incident was used by various Twitter accounts of Indian origin to claim that it was a terrorist attack, in service of the narrative of Pakistan as a ‘terrorist’ and ‘unstable’ country. The timing of this disinformation campaign is not coincidental, it came at a time when Pakistan’s status on the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) was under review via its virtual plenary session from October 21 to 23.

This report, put together by the research team at Digital Rights Foundation (DRF) has documented these trends on October 21, 2020.

**Methodology**
DRF compiled a list of accounts and tweets spreading disinformation through extensive Twitter searches online using keywords such as “Karachi”, “Karachi blast”, “civil war” and “FATF” based on an early analysis of sample tweets being identified by fact-checkers in Pakistan. The tweets were catalogued on this spreadsheet which contains 86 tweets originating from a total of 62 accounts.

**Main Trends**
The disinformation campaign was executed by a combination of verified and unverified accounts, including accounts identifying as “news sources” as well as other accounts purportedly belonging to individuals.

The following is a list of primary accounts spreading disinformation, as identified by DRF’s team:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Handle</th>
<th>Link(s)</th>
<th>Screenshot</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>@ippatel</td>
<td><a href="https://twitter.com/ippatel/status/1318617864862158853">https://twitter.com/ippatel/status/1318617864862158853</a></td>
<td><img src="https://twitter.com/ippatel/status/1318617864862158853" alt="Screenshot" /></td>
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<td><a href="https://twitter.com/ippatel/status/1318636220377956357">https://twitter.com/ippatel/status/1318636220377956357</a></td>
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<td><a href="https://twitter.com/ippatel/status/1318761372054945792">https://twitter.com/ippatel/status/1318761372054945792</a></td>
<td><img src="https://twitter.com/ippatel/status/1318761372054945792" alt="Screenshot" /></td>
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<td><img src="https://twitter.com/ippatel/status/1318638331895439368" alt="Screenshot" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
@TimesNow (verified)  
https://twitter.com/TimesNow/status/1318761205012389889

Protests in Pakistan snowball: Massive protests have erupted on streets. Slogans against Army-ISI.

Pradeep with a report.
@ZeeNewsEnglish (verified)  
https://twitter.com/ZeeNewsEnglish/status/1318777940218310657
https://twitter.com/ZeeNewsEnglish/status/1318805675292741632

@NewsMobileIndia (verified)  
https://twitter.com/NewsMobileIndia/status/1318807710805024768

'Civil War' like situation in Pakistan after reports of Army kidnapping Sindh police chief  
zeeenews.india.com/world/civil-war...

#Pakistan  
#Karachi

3 dead, 15 injured in Karachi blast as 'civil war' like situation emerges in Pakistan  
zeeenews.india.com/world/3-dead-1...

#karachiblast  
#Karachi

Fresh Blast In Karachi, Civil War Like Situation After Reports Of Army Kidnapping Sindh Police Chief  
newsmobile.in/articles/2020/...  
15:53 AM - Oct 21, 2020 - TweetDeck

5 Retweets 1 Quote Tweet 8 Likes
<table>
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<tr>
<th>@TrulyMonica (verified)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Monica ✡ @TrulyMonica</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How many Indian news outlets are covering the civil war in</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>#Karachi?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Their silence and lack of coverage is a tribute to their</td>
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<td></td>
<td>masters in ISI and Pak military</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8:41 AM · Oct 21, 2020 · Twitter for iPhone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>516 Retweets 27 Quote Tweets 1.7K Likes</td>
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</table>

<table>
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<th><a href="https://twitter.com/arunpudur/status/1318772826812248065">https://twitter.com/arunpudur/status/1318772826812248065</a></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>arun pudur ✡ @arunpudur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Why no ISI media in India covering the #CivilWar in #Karachi?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>#Sindh regiment soldiers on LOC vacating positions in Uri sector along LOC. So #POK is being cleared for India to reclaim?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Over 200 Paki politicians arrested</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Pak Army attacking Pak Police</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>@CNNnews (verified)</th>
<th><a href="https://twitter.com/CNNnews18/status/1318893081496711170">https://twitter.com/CNNnews18/status/1318893081496711170</a></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CNNnews18 ✡ @CNNnews18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>#IranUnderSage - Civil War breaks out in Pakistan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Choruses between #Sindh Police and Pakistan Army.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chorus for Imran Khan's ouster grows.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4 Opposition Parties Join forces against the Imran Khan government.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Join @Zakja_Jacob on #ViewPoint</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

![Image: Civil War in Pakistan under pressure, Pak Army Chief orders probe.](https://twitter.com/CNNnews18/status/1318923747684884481)
#NewsAlert | Sindh government overthrown by Pak Army.
Park Army takes control over Pak media.
@AnchorAnandN with details.
Former Diplomat @AmbVPrakash shares his opinion.
Join the broadcast with @AnushaSoni23.
#ImranUnderSeige - Cops vs Army in Karachi, endgame Imran?

Watch #News18Debrief with @shreyashoundial

9:00 PM - Oct 21, 2020 - Twitter Media Studio - LiveCut

1 Quote Tweet 3 Likes

#ImranUnderSeige - Civil War breaks out in Pakistan.
Clashes between Sindh Police and Pakistan Army.
Chorus for Imran Khan's ouster grows.
4 Opposition Parties Join forces against the Imran Khan government.

Join @Zakka_Jacob on #BrassTacks

8:50 PM - Oct 21, 2020 - Twitter Media Studio - LiveCut
@IndiaToday (verified)  
https://twitter.com/IndiaToday/status/1318908531228078083?s=20

@OpIndia_com (verified)  
https://twitter.com/OpIndia_com/status/1318952688533397507?s=20

#ImranUnderSeige - Civil War breaks out in Pakistan.

Clashes between Sindh Police and Pakistan Army.

Chorus for Imran Khan’s custer grows.

Massive explosion in Karachi kills 5

@Arunima24 reports from New Delhi.

Join @AnchorAnandN on #TheRightStand

CIVIL WAR IN PAK
ARREST OF SHARIFS SON-IN-LAW SPARKS STORM

Sindh Police
The unfortunate incident that occurred on the cauosted great heartache and resentment within
resentment

UGLY PAK ARMY VS POLICE FACEOFF
10:30 PM
WITH GAURAV SAWANT

IndiaToday @IndiaToday - 19h
Open rebellion against Imran Khan & Gaurav Javed Raiwar Watch all about the ugly Pak army Vs police face-off on IndiaFirst with @GauravCSawant at 10:30 pm, only on India Today TV. #Promo

Unrest in Karachi as violent clashes broke out after Rangers abducted t...
A civil war is brewing in Pakistan after deadly clashes broke out between Sindh police and Pakistani army over the illegal detention of Sindh police chief

@OpIndia.com

Unrest in Karachi as violent clashes break out after Rangers abduct t.
@AshishSinghNews
https://twitter.com/AshishSinghNews/status/1318606226322644992?s=20

@indiatvnews
https://twitter.com/indiatvnews/status/1318943879173996544

@AdityaRajKaul
https://twitter.com/AdityaRajKaul/status/1309779612751159296
Civil War breaks out in Pakistan against #PakistanArmy. A Shocking turn of events in the ‘failed-state’ Pakistan. Clashes are reported between Pak occupied #Sindh Police & PA #Karachi Referendum2020

Share and Retweet!

Civil War breaks out in Pakistan between Army and Pakistanis. A Shocking turn of events in the ‘failed-state’ Pakistan has thrown the country into a Civil War situation. Clashes are...

IFENewsNetwork.com

11:49 PM - Oct 20, 2020 - Twitter Web App

88 Retweets 
19 Quote Tweets 
186 Likes

#BreakingNews: 5 Pak Army officers died in Firing! Heavy fire between #PakistanArmy and #Sindh Police in #Karachi after Pak Army tried to take custody of a Superintendent of Sindh Police Md Aftab Anwar

Source : (The International Herald)

Read On: ifenewsnetwork.com/civil-war-brea...
@RadioChina
https://twitter.com/RadioChinar/status/1318607458600824832

@TheIntlHerald
https://twitter.com/TheIntlHerald/status/1318640859756318722
https://twitter.com/TheIntlHerald/status/1318621341730308097
https://twitter.com/TheIntlHerald/status/1318635843075137536

BREAKING:
@gauravcsawant @neeraj_najput

Women police officials of Pakistan’s Sindh province seek leave after being ridiculed and sexually humiliated by Pakistani Army.
12:50 AM · Oct 21, 2020 · Twitter for Android
114 Retweets 8 Quote Tweets 285 Likes

BREAKING: Civil war in Pakistan. Reported clashes between Karachi Police & Pak Army

11:33 PM · Oct 20, 2020 · Twitter for Android
683 Retweets 100 Quote Tweets 1.6K Likes
10 Karachi police officers died in clashes between police and Pakistan Army.
@lokshaktidaily

https://twitter.com/lokshaktidaily/status/131886410062016512

Sindh Police
@SindhPoliceDrn

10 Karachi police officers died in Clashes between police and Pakistan Army
#SindhPolice
#SindhGovt
#SindhRejectsIslandOrdinance
#WeStandWithSindhPolice

21:32 · 20/10/2020 · Twitter for Android

Lok Shakti
@lokshaktidaily

Video: #Karachi Blast: Is or Not Civil War like situation in Pakistan?

#Karachi Blast: Is or Not Civil War like situation in Pakistan?

5:06 PM · Oct 21, 2020 · Lokshaktidaily
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Username</th>
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<tr>
<td>@Dilsedesh</td>
<td><a href="https://twitter.com/Dilsedesh/status/1318755065193058306">https://twitter.com/Dilsedesh/status/1318755065193058306</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>@RuthlessIndia</td>
<td><a href="https://twitter.com/Ruthlessindia/status/1318804198973075456">https://twitter.com/Ruthlessindia/status/1318804198973075456</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>@drapr007</td>
<td><a href="https://twitter.com/drapr007/status/1318642162200842240">https://twitter.com/drapr007/status/1318642162200842240</a></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><a href="https://twitter.com/drapr007/status/1318625679160668160">https://twitter.com/drapr007/status/1318625679160668160</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**@Dilsedesh**  
Heavy clashes outside Pakistan #Karachi governor house. Army & Sindh police jawan are now using arms against each other. 25 Pak Jawans just lost their lives following heavy clashes. Tanks are rolling on the streets of Karachi.

**@RuthlessIndia**  
So it is confirmed that it was armed clash between Pak Army & Sindh Police yesterday night, which Pak Army is now portraying as Blast. @drapr007 @FrontalAssault1 had already mentioned this specific location yesterday night itself.

**@drapr007**  
#Karachiblast #Karachi #WeStandWithSindhPolice

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**@drapr007**  
#Karachiblast #Karachi #WeStandWithSindhPolice
#BREAKING: 10 Police officers of #SindhPolice martyred during their line of duty of saving the people of #Karachi from the atrocities of Baloch Army (Pak Army). In cross firing between Pak Army & Sindh Police, reportedly large number of Pak Army soldiers also killed.
(Sources)

https://twitter.com/FrontalAssault1/status/1318842133407797250
https://twitter.com/FrontalAssault1/status/1318813897885995008

Pak army warned the hospitals to not treat the injured in Karachi blast, as a result many people lost their lives without getting treatment.

Locals in Karachi saying today's blast in Karachi has been carried out by Pak Army/ISI to gain sympathy in FATF today. If true, nothing more shameless than Pak Army in this world.
| @MeghUpdataes | [https://twitter.com/MeghUpdates/status/1318575437392486407](https://twitter.com/MeghUpdates/status/1318575437392486407) | Situation Tense in Pakistan. After most of the Sindh police force including head of Force went on leave, COAS Pak Army steps in and says will deploy Army and act against any one trying to act against country. |
| @iArmySupporter | [https://twitter.com/iArmySupporter/status/1318807061828792322](https://twitter.com/iArmySupporter/status/1318807061828792322) | Pak Army has internally ordered investigation into Assets of Sindh Police officers who had applied for leave yesterday and resumed work after assurances. |
| @MeghUpdataes | [https://twitter.com/MeghUpdates/status/1318615323445059584](https://twitter.com/MeghUpdates/status/1318615323445059584) | Who is more Corrupt ?? 
#CivilWar  
#Hypocrisy  
#BackStabbing  
#PakArmyVsSindhPolice  
#WeStandWithSindhPolice |
<p>| @iArmySupporter | <a href="https://twitter.com/iArmySupporter/status/1318639658289434624">https://twitter.com/iArmySupporter/status/1318639658289434624</a> | Reports from across claiming PAF jets in Air (in fear of .......) |
| @MeghUpdataes | <a href="https://twitter.com/iArmySupporter/status/1318620005107957778">https://twitter.com/iArmySupporter/status/1318620005107957778</a> | BREAKING NEWS - Civil war has broken out in Pakistan, between Pak Army and Karachi Police. Till now 10 Karachi police officers died in Clashes between police and Pakistan Army. #StateAboveState #Rejected #GISindh |
| @MeghUpdataes | <a href="https://twitter.com/iArmySupporter/status/1318628000510795778">https://twitter.com/iArmySupporter/status/1318628000510795778</a> | BREAKING NEWS - Pak Army has surroundsted house of Sindh governor. May be Sindh Governor is now in the custody of Pak Army. |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Username</th>
<th>Link</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>@Defence_360</td>
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<td>@ISCResearch</td>
<td><a href="https://twitter.com/ISCResearch/status/1318616105557131268?s=20">Link</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>@dovalraw</td>
<td><a href="https://twitter.com/dovalraw/status/1318614261996818435?s=20">Link</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>@SinghPramod2784</td>
<td><a href="https://twitter.com/SinghPramod2784/status/1318642101781897216?s=20">Link</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Handle</td>
<td>Following</td>
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<td>@alam_mujaid</td>
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<td><a href="https://twitter.com/alam_mujaid/status/1318642060258201600?utm_source=twitter-api&amp;ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw">https://twitter.com/alam_mujaid/status/1318642060258201600?utm_source=twitter-api&amp;ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw</a></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>@ExposedPakistan</td>
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<tr>
<td><a href="https://twitter.com/ExposedPakistan/status/1316275371361271809">https://twitter.com/ExposedPakistan/status/1316275371361271809</a></td>
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<td><a href="https://twitter.com/ExposedPakistan/status/1316599586329247744">https://twitter.com/ExposedPakistan/status/1316599586329247744</a></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Pakistan army allegedly set fire to 100s of fishing boats in Karachi harbour to prevent October 15 protest on the islands of Sindh that have been sold to China.


Earlier Karachi, POK, Gilgit Baltistan and now Punjab under these kind of actions by people.

#Pakistan #Protest #GilgitBaltistan #PakExposed #ShameOnPakistan #PMLN #Punjab
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Username</th>
<th>Followers</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>@ippatel</td>
<td>188K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>@TimesNow</td>
<td>9.8M</td>
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<tr>
<td>@ZeeNewsEnglish</td>
<td>5.2M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>@NewsMobileIndia</td>
<td>15.8K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>@TrulyMonica</td>
<td>39.4K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>@arunpudur</td>
<td>72.1K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>@CNNnews</td>
<td>4.5M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>@IndiaToday</td>
<td>5.3M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>@OpIndia_com</td>
<td>465.7K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>@AshishSinghNews</td>
<td>20.6K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>@indiatvnews</td>
<td>1.4M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>@AdityaRajKaul</td>
<td>279.9K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>@IFENetwork24</td>
<td>15.8K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>@RadioChinar</td>
<td>6,808</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>@TheIntlHerald</td>
<td>9,111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>@SindhPoliceDm</td>
<td>282</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>@lokshaktidaily</td>
<td>434</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>@Dilsedesh</td>
<td>134.3K</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Overall, we observed that the combination of verified and unverified accounts was effective in the dissemination of unverified and fake news. It was noted that while verified accounts did not spread some of the more blatant fake news, the verified accounts created the narrative of ‘civil war’ and ‘unrest’ in Pakistan to supplement the more overt misinformation being shared by other accounts. Some verified accounts belonging to individuals questioned by the mainstream media weren’t covering the ‘civil war’ in India, implying pro-Pakistan bias on their failure to do so. 13 of the accounts that we analysed were verified and around 11 of the analysed accounts positioned themselves as news sources (some of which were verified as well). It is also significant that many of the accounts identified by DRF had a substantial Twitter following.

**Use of Fake Videos and Pictures**

One common trend was the usage of footage from other protests and incidents to share them as ‘anti-army protests’ currently taking place in Pakistan. While it is true that the military establishment is facing criticism from mainstream political parties, this disinformation does not serve genuine and grassroots movements. This
footage has been used by multiple accounts (we identified @7ru7h_1 and @TharkiLanister) as garnering the most engagement.

https://twitter.com/7ru7h_1/status/1318610355275276290
This video was also used by the @TimesNow account (verified account by Twitter) in their video:
Other videos and pictures falsely attributed to protests in Pakistan against the army were also used:

@Kaala_Nag (887 Followers)
https://twitter.com/Kaala_Nag/status/1318977268220416002
@MajAshwinYadav (12 Followers)
https://twitter.com/MajAshwinYadav/status/1318624772045955073?s=20

@VishalBNtiwari (53 Followers)
https://twitter.com/VishalBNtiwari/status/1318786814652477440?s=20
Photoshopped Indian Flag
A photoshopped picture of the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) held a rally in Karachi on October 18, 2020 was used by several accounts to insinuate that the Indian national flag was held by protestors in the crowd, implying that there is pro-India sentiment in Pakistan and a weakening government in Pakistan.

@sri9011 (18K Followers)
(https://twitter.com/sri9011/status/1318747779120861184)
@Ani_Chakravarty (49 followers)
https://twitter.com/Ani_Chakravarty/status/1318645873119617025

@yati_sharma18 (11.2K Followers)
https://twitter.com/yati_sharma18/status/1318766823991517184
@Zoya_nafidi (3,859 Followers)
https://twitter.com/Zoya_nafidi/status/1318422115725438976

@iShivamDubey (32.5K Followers)
https://twitter.com/iShivamDubey/status/1318742085332185088?s=20
The veracity of this picture has been debunked by ‘Soch Fact Checker’ which found that the Indian flag had been doctored into the crowd or falsely attributing the Pashtunkhwa Milli Awami Party flag as the Indian flag.\(^4\)

**Hashtags**

Hashtags such as #FATFBlacklistPakistan, #EndGamePakistan, #ImranUnderSeige and #Sindhudesh were used by several accounts spreading misinformation.

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@republic (verified, 2.1M Followers)
https://twitter.com/republic/status/1318962649690828803

@palki_aggarwal (245 Followers)
https://twitter.com/palki_aggarwal/status/1318874026421284864
Interestingly, some accounts which regularly Tweet in Hindi switched to English when tweeting about Pakistan. It can be speculated that the language switch was a deliberate tactic to address the international community.

Efforts were also made to appear as if the information was coming from within Pakistan. This was seen through a fake account impersonating the Sindh police (Original account: https://twitter.com/sindhpolicedmc, @sindhpolicedmc).
Response from Pakistan

In Pakistan this disinformation campaign was met with humour, fact-checking and reporting from both mainstream\(^5\) and social media. Major news outlets covered the disinformation campaign and highlighting the use of humour to respond to the more blatant fake news tweets on social media. Twitter users used memes\(^6\) and hashtags such as #CivilWarInPakistan, #IndianMedia and #CivilWarInKarachi to respond to the disinformation.

It also needs to be pointed out that disinformation campaigns such as these are not new for both countries. In the past a “global network of pro-Indian fake websites and think-tanks is aimed at influencing decision-making in Europe” was uncovered


by EU Disinfo Lab, a Brussels-based NGO. The network focused on anti-Pakistan content and lobbying.

More recently, the Stanford Internet Observatory reported on a “network of Pakistan-based Facebook and Instagram accounts suspended for coordinated inauthentic behavior reveals mass reporting to silence critics of Islam and Pakistan.”

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About DRF
The Digital Rights Foundation (DRF) is a non-governmental organization, established in 2012, working on the intersection of human rights with technology, with a particular focus on freedom of expression, right to privacy and protections against gender-based violence in online spaces.

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